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SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/ERA AND NEA/MAG (NARDI AND HAYES)

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [XI](#) [EU](#) [TS](#)

SUBJECT: TUNISIA/EU: TUNISIA'S FAILED QUEST TO HOST THE UPM  
HEADQUARTERS; BEN ALI ANGER OVER MOROCCO'S SPECIAL STATUS

REF: A. TUNIS 1136

[B](#). PARIS 2023

Classified By: Ambassador Robert F. Godec for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) In the aftermath of Tunisia's announcement that it was not interested in hosting the Union of the Mediterranean (UPM) or providing its Secretary General (Ref A), the diplomatic corps has been abuzz with rumors about what happened and why. European diplomatic representatives to Tunisia have told us that it was the Dutch and Danes who blocked Tunisia's candidacy on grounds of its poor human rights record. The Romanian Ambassador noted that four Arab countries had worked against Tunisia's candidacy. Morocco and Algeria, in addition to Syria, were said to be among those four. The Dutch Ambassador opined that the fact that Tunisia sent a Secretary of State (roughly the equivalent of an Under Secretary) to the Marseille ministerial, rather than the Foreign Minister himself, had also damaged Tunisia's standing at the meeting. She characterized that decision as "horrendous diplomatic mismanagement" on Foreign Minister Abdallah's part.

[1](#)2. (C/NF) Meanwhile, Tunisian-American Chamber of Commerce President and well-connected businessman Mondher Ben Ayed told EmbOffs that he had learned from an informed source that President Ben Ali had been quite angry when he learned that Morocco had attained "Advanced Status" with the EU. Ben Ali was said to have called in the Foreign Minister for a dressing down over Tunisia's relative lack of status.

[1](#)3. (C/NF) Comment: FM Abdallah may have decided to skip the Marseille meeting since it had already become clear that the lack of Arab League consensus would prevent Tunis's bid to house the UPM. It is surprising, however, how little effort went into what could have been a consolation prize: a Tunisian Secretary General for the organization. The FM's mishandling of the UPM issue is symptomatic of a wider pattern of diplomatic mismanagement and missed opportunities, which is also evidenced by the lack of "advanced status" with the EU. Embassy will report further on this trend septel.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/tunis/index.cfm>  
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